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SUBJECT: BANDA ANNOUNCES OCTOBER 30 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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¶1. (U) On September 9, Vice President Rupiah Banda announced that the presidential by-election will be held on Thursday, October 30, laying to rest any speculation that the Zambian Government is still considering suspending the elections (reftel). This poll date fully complies with the constitutional requirement that elections be held within 90 days of President Mwanawasa's death, falling over two weeks before the November 17 deadline.

¶2. (SBU) Banda also used his televised address as an opportunity to thank Zambians for their prayers on behalf of the late president as well as their peaceful conduct in the immediate aftermath of his death. The Vice President spent the remainder of his speech avowing his intention to respect Mwanawasa's legacy and elaborating at great length on his plans to improve Zambia's economy, sustain its agricultural sector, contain inflation, develop transportation infrastructure, and invest in needed energy generation. In short, the announcement provided a suitable opportunity for the presidential candidate to launch his own campaign.

¶3. (SBU) The October 30 poll date shortens the time available for campaigning--which was already abbreviated by 21 days of mourning--by an additional 18 days. This is most likely to work in Banda's favor, given his access to government vehicles and funding (whether rightly or not) and an arsenal of almost two dozen Cabinet members to campaign on his behalf. With less than 50 days to go before the election, Banda's rivals (presumably with fewer human and financial resources at their disposal) will be hard pressed to reach remote areas with the same degree of success.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: Banda's presumptuous announcement was really the responsibility of the still silent Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ). The arrogant attitude of this government indicates that Banda and his cabinet think that this is "their" election to hold, if and when they want.

KOPLOVSKY